



Tysha Owens – Acting Warden
Nova Institution for Women
180 James Street
Truro, Nova Scotia B2N 6R8

July 14, 2026

Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, June 2026

Dear Tysha,

We want to thank the Institutional Management Team at Nova Institution for Women (Nova) for taking the time to meet with our Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team on June 25, 2026.

This letter summarizes reports received and conditions observed by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) during our advocacy visits on June 3, 16, and 17. It also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the June 25 meeting, identifies relevant laws and policies, and sets out CAEFS' recommendations.

Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

S. Thompson

Shelby Thompson
Lead Advocate, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS



Follow Up: Common Access List

Description: In April 2026, CAEFS had advised Nova management via email that many phone numbers on the common access list were missing or incorrect. The common access list is a list of phone numbers that are available to all incarcerated people at Nova without prior individual approval. CAEFS, in consultation with people at Nova, developed a revised list, which was shared with management. Management responded that the list would be updated throughout the penitentiary.

CAEFS received reports during our June advocacy visit that several phone numbers on the list still do not work or are missing from the list entirely. People shared that several living units are missing the printed copy of the common access list, which has reportedly prevented people from accessing resources related to reintegration, community support, and legal advocacy.

Discussion: Management requested that CAEFS share the phone numbers that still require correction and indicated that they will make revisions and distribute the list to all living units.

Law and Policy

CCRA s. 3(b): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by assisting the rehabilitation of [incarcerated people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA s. 71(1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated persons] and the community, an [incarcerated person] is entitled to have reasonable contact, including visits and correspondence, with family, friends and other persons from outside the penitentiary, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

CD 085 s.18: Telephone communication is a part of the overall program of reintegration into the community, similar to visits and temporary absences.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure all common access lists are current, accessible, and consistently available across the penitentiary. Meaningful access to community-based organizations, government departments, and legal supports is essential to upholding the rights of incarcerated people and CSC's reintegration mandate.

Follow Up: Institutional Mother-Child Program

Description: Last month, CAEFS shared reports with management about the Mother-Child Program (MCP) at Nova, including concerns related to access to essential supplies and escorted temporary absences (ETAs). At that time, management shared with CAEFS that the structure of financial support for the MCP would be changing, and that all MCP participants would be required to financially provide for their children residing at the institution full or part time moving forward.

During our June visit, CAEFS continued to receive reports that MCP participants face ongoing challenges accessing ETAs, specifically that their ETA application to purchase essential supplies for their children have been denied. MCP participants further expressed that, with this change in purchasing practice, they are facing increased



barriers to providing day-to-day items for their children as their only source of income is that which they receive from the penitentiary, which ranges from \$2.50 to \$6.90 per day. This was especially concerning for people who do not have substantive financial support from family.

Discussion: Management clarified that parents participating in the MCP have always been expected to provide financially for their children who reside at Nova; however, Nova has historically supplemented this support. Despite this change in practice, management shared that no children would go without essential items. Management also shared that this change in practice was meant to align with expectations of parental financial responsibilities upon release.

Law and Policy:

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3(1): In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

CCRA s.70: The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that penitentiaries, the penitentiary environment, the living and working conditions of [incarcerated persons] and the working conditions of staff members are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity.

CD 768, Purpose: To foster positive relationships between federally incarcerated mothers and their child, by keeping them together where appropriate, and providing a supportive environment that promotes stability and continuity for the mother-child relationship

CD 700 s.10(5): [The Parole Officer will] facilitate the [incarcerated person's] reintegration into the community at the earliest possible time while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure MCP participants are able to provide for their children who reside at Nova, and that financial barriers do not prevent access to participation. The imposed limits on a person's income during incarceration should not create barriers to participation in a program designed to support family connection, stability, and reintegration. CAEFS suggests that MCP participants be provided with adequate financial support from CSC to ensure the wellbeing of their children. CAEFS further suggests that Nova ensure the accessibility of ETAs and unescorted temporary absences in order to facilitate the purchasing of day-to-day items, access to family, and other community resources and activities to support the wellbeing of the child.

Follow Up: Access to Family and Family Liaison Officer

Description: CAEFS continues to receive reports that the family liaison officer (FLO) at Nova is not accessible. People at Nova shared with CAEFS their impression that "she is never here." It was reported that when people attend their scheduled appointments with the FLO, she does not show up and the meeting does not proceed. The absence of the FLO, and the resulting lack of consistency in maintaining critical family relationships, has had a negative emotional impact on people at Nova. People reported the increased importance of accessing the FLO for those who have been displaced from their families as a result of intraregional transfers.



Discussion: Management confirmed that the FLO is no longer employed at Nova and that the position will not be filled. Management is determining how responsibilities previously held by the FLO will be reassigned, including processes for family access and support.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 3(b): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by assisting the rehabilitation of [incarcerated people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA s. 4(g): correctional policies, programs and practices respect gender, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and are responsive to the special needs of women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups.

CCRA s. 71(1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated persons] and the community, an [incarcerated person] is entitled to have reasonable contact, including visits and correspondence, with family, friends and other persons from outside the penitentiary, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure individuals have timely and reliable access to family support services as well as clear and consistent pathways for maintaining family relationships and managing family responsibilities. Meaningful family connection is a critical component of wellbeing and reintegration and should not be disrupted by changes in staffing or the restructuring of service delivery.

Access to Funds

Description: CAEFS received reports from people who are experiencing financial barriers at Nova. People explained that funds are only transferred into their accounts once every two weeks, and that depending on when money is received by the institution, individuals sometimes wait several weeks before being able to access their funds. This delay has an impact on people's ability to purchase essential items and maintain family contact, for example paying for phone calls or postage for mail.

People also shared that requiring families to obtain money orders in order to send money in to their incarcerated loved one creates added barriers for families, requiring additional time and resources. People commented on how much easier and more accessible the provincial system was in this regard, noting that transfers of money to incarcerated people can be completed from any mobile device.

Discussion: Management indicated that some administrative delays may be unavoidable and that individuals requiring support may request to speak with the financial specialist. Management also noted that ensuring paperwork submitted by incarcerated people is accurate and within required timelines would also reduce delays.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4(c): the Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [federally sentenced people];



CCRA s. 78.1(b): [For the purpose of] providing financial assistance to [incarcerated persons] to facilitate their reintegration into the community

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC take all reasonable steps to ensure financial processes are timely, accessible, and responsive to individuals' needs in order to reduce additional barriers to maintaining family connections, meeting basic needs, or preparing for reintegration. CAEFS encourages CSC to explore other, less restrictive, methods for allowing loved ones to provide financial support to their incarcerated family member.

Cohabitation with Partner

Description: CAEFS received reports that all couples who were residing together in the same living unit were separated and moved into different living units. Couples reported being frustrated, saddened, and confused by the decision. Many couples reported that their relationships were healthy, supportive, contributed to their overall wellbeing, and were not interfering with their correctional plans. People shared with CAEFS that they felt this decision was discriminatory on the grounds of sexuality and relationship status. Impacted couples asked what process to follow to resume living with their partner.

Discussion: CAEFS shared that some couples would like to work with management to clarify the process for cohabitation requests. Management indicated that housing moves are based on risk assessments rather than relationship status, and that individuals who believe their move was connected to relationship status may request to speak with management directly. They also noted that requests for house moves are coordinated by the Correctional Manager (CM).

Law and Policy:

Canadian Human Rights Act s.3(1): For all purposes of this Act, the prohibited grounds of discrimination are race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.

CCRA s. 4(d): [Federally sentenced people] retain the rights of all members of society except those that are, as a consequence of the sentence, lawfully and necessarily removed or restricted.

Recommendation: In 2019, as result of a case before the Canadian Human Rights Commission, CSC distributed a memo that stated that "Correctional Service of Canada has no tolerance for discrimination with respect to inmate accommodation. Inmate requests for house/cell moves will not be declined based on sexual orientation or relationship status. All requests will be considered based on the provisions outlined in Commissioner's Directive 550 – Inmate Accommodation." CAEFS encourages CSC to abide by this commitment and to ensure transparent and consistent decision-making in regard to cohabitation requests in order to uphold the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ people and people in relationships at Nova.

Physical Conditions of Confinement: Double Bunking

Description: CAEFS received reports from people who are double bunked about the impacts these conditions have on their physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. Some individuals reported that they are sleeping on a mattress on the floor, as they exceed the maximum recommended weight for sleeping on a top bunk and do not feel



as though they can access the top bunk safely. People also reported being unable to practice their religion openly and freely, as they require privacy for prayer multiple times a day.

CAEFS learned that all living units within the medium-security compound have had additional beds added, bringing the total number of people per house to 10. People also reported that developers were onsite in June to move forward with plans to build an additional housing unit with a capacity of 20 people.

Discussion: Management indicated that population pressures continue to affect penitentiaries nationally, and that options for managing double bunking levels at Nova are limited. They also shared that they have reached out to the bunk bed manufacturer for guidance regarding weight restrictions. Management encouraged individuals who are experiencing barriers to expressing their spirituality or engaging in prayer due to double bunking to request a meeting with management directly. Management confirmed that site determination is underway for an additional living unit with 10 shared-accommodation cells, totaling 20 people.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (g): Correctional policies, programs and practices respect gender, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and are responsive to the special needs of women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups.

CCRA s. 75: An [incarcerated person] is entitled to reasonable opportunities to freely and openly participate in, and express, religion or spirituality, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

CD 550 s. 7: Population management strategies must include single occupancy when feasible and ensure that double bunking remains a temporary accommodation measure.

CD 550 s.16: There may be a requirement to move an [incarcerated person] for staff to effectively provide first aid. For this reason, consideration will be given to placing [incarcerated people] with medical conditions or weighing more than 90 kilograms in the lower bunk.

Recommendation: CAEFS notes that the policy restricting the weight of people on the top bunk is to ensure that staff can effectively provide first aid and is not related to the manufacturer's weight recommendations. CAEFS is concerned by the rising number of federally sentenced women, the increased reliance on double-bunking and the move towards expanding living units, and the resulting harmful impacts on penitentiary environments. These approaches are inconsistent with evidence that most women can be safely managed in the community at lower cost to Canadians and with better outcomes. CAEFS recommends that CSC prioritize timely reintegration to reduce overcrowding and ensure that community supervision applies the least restrictive measures to prevent unnecessary revocations.

Physical Conditions of Confinement: Extreme Heat

Description: It was reported to CAEFS that living units, work, and program buildings were, during periods of high temperatures, very hot and uncomfortable. People also shared with CAEFS that each living unit is provided with only 2 fans and that these are insufficient to relieve 10 people from the extreme heat. It was further shared that



people at Nova received information on how to stay safe in the heat, but this information did not include information about the cooling station. It was reported that the cooling station was not available at all.

Discussion: CAEFS raised that in May 2026, during the Inmate Committee (IC) meeting, management shared that anytime the temperature exceeded 30 degrees, without the humidex, the cooling stations would be activated. Yet, there were 3 days in June that exceeded 30 degrees and the cooling stations were not open. Management clarified that the cooling station is actually activated when temperatures reach 40 degrees and that opportunity to access is communicated on a day-by-day basis. Management explained that the cooling station provides access to water, ice, and industrial fans, but that it is not air conditioned. When asked, management advised that individuals in the maximum-security unit will have access to ice and additional time outside their cells or on the pod during periods of extreme heat, as they are unable to access the cooling station.

Law and Policy:

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s.12: Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

CCRA s.3: The purpose of the correctional system is to contribute to a just, peaceful, and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of incarcerated people and by assisting the rehabilitation of [incarcerated people] and their reintegration into community as law-abiding citizens.

CCRA s. 70: The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that penitentiaries, the penitentiary environment, the living and working conditions of [incarcerated persons] and the working conditions of staff members are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person’s sense of personal dignity.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that Nova align its practices with the extreme heat temperature thresholds set out by Environment and Climate Change Canada, which identify 29 degrees as the threshold for extreme heat in Nova Scotia¹. CAEFS encourages Nova to implement further heat-mitigating measures and to ensure access to cooling stations during extreme heat events in order to support the health and wellbeing of people incarcerated at Nova. Given that people in federal penitentiaries are disproportionately impacted by systemic inequities that contribute to higher rates of health concerns compared to the general population, CAEFS encourages CSC to consider the growing impacts of rising summer temperatures across the country, where prolonged periods of 30°C and above are increasingly common, and assess whether the provision of air conditioning for incarcerated populations is required under multiple provisions of the CCRA.

Population Update

The reported number of incarcerated people at Nova at the time of the management meeting was 124 people, with 2 people currently incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Unit.

¹ Environment and Climate Canada, *Extreme Heat Events: Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators (2025)*, Annex C, Table C.1 Extreme Heat Temperature Thresholds: Daytime Maximum Temperature: 29 Degrees Celsius.